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Getting Past Trump

This a 3-part essay. Part one is also cross-posted on [Truthout](#).

Part 1: This Is How Democracies Die

Donald Trump's 13-month tenure (so far) as president of the United States has been an exhausting sprint for onlookers concerned about the state of the global ecosystem and the fate of industrial civilization. Nearly every day begins with a new outrage — whether [Trump's gutting of the Environmental Protection Agency](#), his announcement of the [US exit from the Paris climate accord](#), [his selling off of national parks](#), [his opening of coastal waters for offshore drilling](#), [his easing of regulations on fracking](#), or his [seeking subsidies for coal mining and coal power plants](#). Among my environmentalist friends and colleagues, "Trump fatigue" is a real and common ailment.

But much the same could be said for millions of citizens who are only peripherally interested in environmental issues. They awake each morning to read about the [Stormy Daniels scandal](#), the Rob Porter scandal, the [Anthony Scaramucci hiring/firing scandal](#), the [Mike Flynn scandal](#), the [James Comey firing scandal](#), the [Tom Price scandal](#), the [White House nepotism and security clearance scandal](#). The list could go on and on; who can possibly keep up?

The Tweeter-in-chief is monopolizing attention at a moment in history when there are plenty of other things we really should be attending to, including climate change, resource depletion, plastic pollution in the oceans, mass species extinction, the fate of US labor unions, racial and social injustice, and worsening economic inequality. These are the sorts of unaddressed problems that could cause even history's "greatest" civilization to crack up. But the conversation never seems to get past Trump, who obdurately obstructs action on these issues while commanding everyone's constant adoring or horrified attention through divisive words and actions.

Naturally, many people are speculating about how the Trump nightmare might end. Two possibilities include Democrats obtaining majorities in Congress in the 2018 elections and initiating impeachment proceedings, or a presidential resignation following

indictments of staff and family.

But Trump may not be dislodged so easily: A war or terrorist incident [could give him the pretext](#) to at least partly shut down the apparatus of democracy (including the Mueller investigation). An Italian friend reminds me that [Trump shares many characteristics with Silvio Berlusconi](#) — who, despite frequent scandals, has managed to dominate national politics in Italy for nearly 20 years.

While I'm not prepared to make a prediction about Trump's fate (there are just too many variables and unknowns), I have come to an unpleasant conclusion: While Trump will certainly be gone at some point — whether next month or years from now — we're never going to return to the pre-Trump status quo. The system is irremediably broken. Trump is both a symptom and an agent of that brokenness. What we *can* do is begin to reconnoiter and assess our new, unstable, still-emerging reality.

To even begin to understand this new reality, it is first essential to recognize its context. The United States, and industrial societies generally, are approaching the end of a decades-long fiesta of rapid economic and population growth founded upon cheap fossil energy. I've discussed this grand trajectory in several books, notably *The Party's Over* and *The End of Growth*, so it's unnecessary to go into much detail here, except to note that absolute production figures for oil, coal and natural gas (which have been rising in recent years) are less crucial than the accelerating decline in the amount of energy that society receives [in return for each unit of energy it invests](#) in procuring *more* energy. This erosion of energy return on energy investment is unavoidable, given the method by which fossil fuels are harvested, with low-hanging fruit always being picked first. Energy is the prime mover of civilization; therefore, as net energy declines, so does society's capacity to build complex infrastructure, and increase production and consumption.

Everyone feels this diminishing systemic dynamism, but — since surprisingly few people pay attention to slow but decisive shifts in our energy economy — almost nobody understands it, including the most exalted economists. So, feeling symptoms of malaise but unable to diagnose the cause, most people are driven simply to find someone to blame — whether Wall Street bankers, immigrants, international competitors (for the US, that would include China), "lazy" poor people, entrenched Washington lobbyists and bureaucrats, or "socialists" in the mainstream media.

The waning of the world's energy return on investment isn't a sudden development. Our energy regime grew, matured and weakened in stages. Back in the years when it was "great," the US was the engine of the global fossil fuel power train. Prior to World War II, it was the [world's top producer and exporter of petroleum](#); it was also the foremost producer of coal and natural gas. But that gradually changed. In the 1970s, US oil and gas production began to decline (this was decades before the fracking boom — a subject to which we'll return shortly); the nation was already importing more and more of its energy supplies. In the 1980s, globalization began, and [the amount of debt in the US economy started growing much faster than the economy itself](#). Real (inflation-adjusted) incomes of

most US workers stagnated or declined. Debt was effectively being used to purchase the services that energy provides, with the understanding that payment would be made later with interest. The use of debt to mask flagging economic momentum is an old trick, and — as economists and historians have discovered — it works for only a relatively short time before [precipitating financial collapse](#).

Parenthetically, some readers may be wondering whether renewable energy might shift the curve of falling energy profitability. Unfortunately, the energy return on energy invested for solar and wind energy systems, once energy storage to make up for intermittency is included, is probably no higher than that of shale gas or tight oil: The energy return from commercial photovoltaic panels is estimated at 10:1 in most US locations (without factoring the energy cost of batteries), whereas during much of the 20th century, oil [provided a 50:1 energy payback](#) or better. Further, according to one recent study, installation rates for renewable energy would need to be [roughly 10-times current rates](#) in order to accomplish the transition to solar and wind before fossil fuel depletion and climate change undermine the current global industrial system.

By the first decade of the new millennium, it was clear to quickly growing ideological groups on the further ends of the political spectrum that the US was headed off the rails. An insulated and arrogant foreign policy establishment in Washington was initiating costly, disastrous, illegal and unwinnable wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (with later detours to Libya and Syria). Government and private debt was accumulating to truly frightening levels, with entitlements like Social Security and Medicare on track to boost government deficits exponentially in decades ahead. Rates of annual GDP growth were slowly but surely dwindling. Levels of economic inequality were approaching those of the fabled Gilded Age, when Marxists and anarchists riled the disgruntled masses. The nation's manufacturing base continued to [erode due to globalization](#). Massive industrial and transport infrastructure, built mostly during the high-energy decades of the mid-to-late 20th century, was aging and rusting. Following the Vietnam War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became harder to feel pride in being an American. Instead of bringing democracy to the world, we were more concerned with protecting our access to global oil supplies, distracting ourselves with comic book hero movies and exporting a culture of celebrity worship. An empire, built on the extraction of nonrenewable energy resources and on domination of world trade, was losing its grip.

Understandably, blame for unmet expectations fell largely upon elites — whether in government, the media, academia, the financial sector, science or the arts. But resentment toward immigrants and other easily scapegoated minority groups was also increasing in some quarters.

Enter Donald J. Trump, real estate developer and reality-television star. According to later reporting by Michael Wolff and others, Trump — who lacked experience in electoral politics — had no realistic expectation of winning the presidential race of 2016; he mainly hoped to increase his visibility and the value of his brand. This meant he was free to say anything, however politically incorrect or factually erroneous, to rouse his audiences. Trump, with help from self-styled

political theorist Steve Bannon, promised to destroy the “administrative state” — the human bureaucracy and mass of regulations that propped up the failing status quo. He would “shake things up” by shredding global trade agreements and renegotiating bilateral trade treaties to the US’s advantage. He would radically reduce taxes. He would rebuild the nation’s fraying infrastructure. He would reduce both undocumented and documented immigration. He would prevent the US from getting involved in more needless, costly wars. He would “drain the swamp” in Washington, DC. And by doing these things, he would “Make America Great Again.”

When, to nearly everyone’s surprise (reportedly including his own), Trump won the presidency, he found himself in a tough spot: His team did not include enough competent people to fill newly emptied positions in the various agencies of the executive branch of government. The few available personnel consisted mostly of ideologues, hangers-on and fellow grifters — often evincing as little relevant job experience as Trump himself — as well as people avowedly dedicated to the destruction of the agencies to which they would be appointed. Over time, the new president and his team generated more and more dysfunction, resulting in a string of firings and resignations. As government, it was a trainwreck; but as reality TV, it was as riveting.

Meanwhile, the status of the nation’s all-important energy economy was more hidden from view than ever due to the temporary spectacle of soaring US oil and gas production from fracking. Rates of domestic shale gas and tight oil production were soaring, leading the new president to speak of US “energy dominance.” But companies specializing in producing these fuels were — and are — doing so at [an overall financial loss](#), propped up by cheap debt and investor hype. Their inability to turn a profit is a clear symptom of eroding energy return on investment, but is rarely understood as such. Inevitably, as interest rates rise and investors start demanding returns, [the fracking bubble](#) will pop even more quickly than it inflated.

What Trump has done politically is somewhat analogous to the country’s fracking frenzy. He spoke a politically forbidden truth — that the United States is headed toward the graveyard of empires; he then promised a return to “greatness.” But just as fracking has failed to reverse the nation’s slide toward energy bankruptcy, Trump’s means of reviving its greatness (a budget-busting tax cut and divisive rhetoric) have only accelerated the US’s nosedive into economic, moral, social and political ruin.

Part 2: The Russia Connection

In Part 1 of this essay we surveyed the historical, economic, and cultural context for the upset victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. I did not mention Russian interference in that election. That’s because it is a subject that deserves to be treated on its own. It is, of course, a source of heated controversy: leaders of the national security agencies and the FBI are unanimous in saying that Russia made a concerted effort to impact the election, while denial that such interference took place has emanated from the White House, Fox News, and some Republicans in Congress. The latter’s

motivation is fairly transparent: questioning the legitimacy of the election shines an unfavorable light on the Trump administration and the Republican Party. Interestingly, however, voices on the far left have likewise argued that the Mueller investigation is a “witch hunt” that should be shut down. This peculiar state of affairs deserves attention, and I’ll be discussing it at some length. Even though we will be focusing on a very small subsection of the U.S. population, the shifts there are illustrative of trends with wide impacts.

Journalist [Glenn Greenwald](#) and ex-CIA analyst/political activist [Ray McGovern](#), both favorites of the left, have penned articles arguing there is no direct evidence of conspiracy between the Trump campaign and Russia; they also suggest that the Mueller investigation is in effect an effort by the Deep State to expel an irritant (Trump) from the body politic—an effort that runs roughshod over the Constitution and thereby imperils American democracy. Several of my leftist acquaintances are of the same opinion. Why would vociferous critics of Trump and the Republican Party be singing from the same song sheet as Trump in this instance?

Once again, a little background helps. The American left is permanently and understandably enraged at the U.S. national security apparatus (the Pentagon, CIA, NSA, FBI, and State Department) following decades of military invasions and bombings in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia, etc.; the overthrow of elected governments in Iran, Guatemala, Congo, Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Chile; and support for dictators in the Philippines, Haiti, Guatemala, and elsewhere. By extension, many on the far left also hold the centrist, Clinton-led dominant wing of the Democratic Party in utter contempt. In the view of some leftists, the United States is pursuing a global plan for war that will never cease until all rivals to Washington are under heel. Accordingly, they have viewed the rise of Russia on the world stage as a necessary counterbalance to Washington’s imperial overreach. Meanwhile Russia (through RT and other outlets) has provided exposure for far-left intellectuals in the West whom the U.S. mainstream media often shuts out.

Leftist commentators frequently point out that [Russia has a genuine gripe against America](#): after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the U.S. treated Russia miserably by expanding NATO (which [Western leaders had promised they would not do](#)). Further, the U.S. has routinely interfered in other nations’ elections, including (reputedly) the [1996 Russian presidential election](#). For these reasons complaints about Russia tipping the scales in the 2016 American election ring somewhat hollow.

For most far-leftists, it is not just the U.S. intelligence community that is to be distrusted, but the mainstream media as well: the *New York Times* and other prominent outlets were wrong about Afghanistan, wrong about Iraq, wrong about Libya, wrong about Syria. So why should we now believe them with regard to Trump and Russia? Hence at least some far-leftists seem as likely to link and tweet articles by Russian apologists like Alexander Mercouris and Moon Of Alabama as those by Noam Chomsky or Cornel West.

The problem with all this is that, however useful Russia may be as a

check on U.S. warmongering foreign policy, it is nevertheless a fairly ruthless dictatorship. Russia is clearly promoting far-right and far-left political voices in Europe [in an effort to destabilize the West](#), and appears to be doing the same in the United States. Evidence cited in one Mueller indictment suggests that Moscow's agents worked not just on behalf of Trump, but [Bernie Sanders and Jill Stein as well](#)—though no one has claimed so far that either of these candidates actively conspired with Russia. Even if understandable or somehow justifiable, Russia's efforts to influence elections in the U.S. and elsewhere won't result in any advantage to the people of the countries targeted—any more than America's longstanding similar efforts have done.

I won't go into great detail summarizing the evidence that Russia did in fact interfere in the election on Trump's behalf, and that the Trump campaign encouraged and likely conspired in those efforts. [James Risen](#), [Luke Harding](#), and [Michael Isikoff](#) have already done a good job in this regard. Russia and the Trump campaign had motive, means, and opportunity, and there is direct and indirect evidence for both interference and conspiracy. That evidence is increasingly contained in indictments, confessions, and guilty pleas. Yes, it is surely possible that U.S. intelligence agencies have doctored or even fabricated evidence of Russian election tampering. In that regard, there are remaining questions about the DNC email hack and the Steele dossier. But remove the hack and the dossier from discussion, and there's still an impressive pile of evidence that virtually no one (other than clear Russia apologists) disputes.

Prior to the election campaign, Trump had financial relationships with shady Russians and did business in Moscow. During the campaign, he surrounded himself with advisers who had similar contacts and entanglements. On the campaign stump, he repeatedly praised Putin. During the campaign, Trump's surrogates traveled to Moscow, exchanged frequent telephone calls with Russian officials and agents, and responded "I love it!" when illegally offered compromising information about Clinton by Russian sources. Trump publicly called for the Russians to "find" Clinton's "lost" emails (one of his many profoundly unfunny "jokes").

Meanwhile, we now know that Russia employed organizations to hack secure websites; organized [scores of social media trolls](#) and ad buys; paid teams to gather sensitive voter information at the state level; and [even organized pro- and anti-Trump public rallies](#). Facebook has estimated that about 10 million people saw Russian ads [targeting users in Michigan and Wisconsin](#)—states Trump won by roughly 10,000 votes and 22,000 votes, respectively.

Once in office, Trump promptly divulged classified information to the Russian ambassador. He met with or telephoned Vladimir Putin repeatedly with no American present to record the conversation (which was utterly unprecedented). He appointed a Secretary of State with close ties to Moscow. And he has refused to implement sanctions on Russia that were passed overwhelmingly by Republican-dominated Congress and that he was more or less forced to sign.

In response to this litany, far-right and far-left commentators insist there is no definitive proof of collusion yet. But we should not expect

to have such evidence in the public record at this stage. That's the point of an investigation: to find what culprits seek to hide. The process involves subpoenaing witnesses and getting little fish to flip on big fish until the truth is revealed in sworn testimony. Recall Watergate: clear evidence of Nixon's personal involvement wasn't forthcoming until late in the two-year investigation, after the release of tapes of Oval Office conversations. Also, it's entirely possible that many charges ultimately brought against Trump's innermost circle will relate to financial crimes rather than conspiracy against the United States or obstruction of justice.

In my view, the Russian effort to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election was likely the most successful low-budget covert operation in history. At least one of its aims (if not the primary one) was to disrupt the internal political system of the U.S., and in this it succeeded beyond any reasonable expectation. The operation probably couldn't have worked so well without Facebook, but it probably could have worked just fine without direct help from the Trump campaign. Yet perhaps that was itself a crucial part of the plan: Moscow's intelligence operatives may have been careful to get some of the Trump team's fingerprints on the election interference process so that, when an investigation eventually uncovered those clues, the entire American political system would erupt in recriminations, with charges of treason and counter-charges of "deep-state coup" leading to system meltdown.

I probably won't change many minds about Trump/Russia in what I've written above. Some will probably conclude that I've sold my soul to the Clintonites (for the record, I did not support Clinton in the election), or that I've bought into anti-Russian propaganda emanating from the neoconservative foreign policy establishment. But that's also part of the story: we are entering a post-truth era in which tribal alignment matters far more than mere facts, which are becoming ever harder to establish to everyone's agreement. Jennifer Kavanaugh calls this "[truth decay](#)," and notes that it makes the job of informing and mobilizing the public much harder—not just with regard to Trump-Russia or politics in general, but also when it comes to climate change and the other collective survival threats.

Some caveats: I'm not suggesting that war brinkmanship with Russia would be a good idea. And I'm not in favor of demonizing anyone in the U.S. who has connections with, or good things to say about Russia (as [Matt Taibbi](#) argues is happening). Nor am I arguing that Russia was entirely or even primarily responsible for the Trump victory. It was a close race due to the factors unpacked in Part 1 of this essay. Russian interference may have played a crucial role in tipping the scales, but that would never have been possible if Americans were not already turning against their perceived political elites due to perceived failures.

Again, the real point here is that this is [how democracies die](#). The rot begins within, but there are often external players who take advantage of the situation, or hasten the decay (as occurred also in the case in ancient Rome).

Even if Trump himself were gone tomorrow, the nation still faces simmering crises (falling energy return on investment, increasing

economic inequality, over-reliance on debt, climate change) that appear to be leading toward collapse of government and the economy; meanwhile, as a result of political polarization, social fragmentation, plain old corruption ([see NRA](#)), and truth decay we are losing whatever ability we ever had to address those crises.

Part 3: The Futility of "Big Green" Activism: A Conversation With Tim DeChristopher

If environmentalists hope to have any real success in the age of Trump, they will have to change strategies and tactics in response to a transformed political and social context.

Back in the long-ago, hard-to-recall days before Trump became president, environmental (as well as peace and human rights) nonprofit organizations engaged in a routine, ritualized two-part dance of raising money from contributors, and then trying to convince policy makers to do something to save the world -- or at least reduce the scale of harms being done. What was actually accomplished was never enough to actually turn society in the direction of sustainability, but the effort was in some respects its own reward: Activists felt useful, and in some cases, fundraising produced enough to pay salaries. And there were occasional victories to celebrate.

Now the United States is led by an authoritarian who is steadily undermining our democratic norms and institutions, and a Congress that is either bought and paid for by moneyed interests, or is too scared to challenge them meaningfully. It's clear that no amount of cajoling, wheedling, imploring, threatening or explaining will convince Congress or the executive branch of the federal government to do anything whatsoever to address the panoply of do-or-die problems confronting us. Why even bother asking them?

Recall it was the failure of elites to address real underlying problems that contributed to the advent of Trump in the first place. Now, of course, at least from environmentalists' perspective, Trump is making everything much, much worse: It's probably fair to say that the Trump administration has never met an environmental regulation it didn't want to kill.

What should environmentalists do under these changed circumstances? What strategies should environmental organizations pursue?

In order to get some helpful perspective, I recently corresponded with activist Tim DeChristopher, cofounder of [Climate Disobedience Center](#). I respect DeChristopher for two important reasons: He has a good understanding of the range of overshoot issues humanity currently faces, and he has the courage of his convictions (he spent nearly two years in federal prison for a creative act of civil disobedience recounted in the documentary film [Bidder 70](#)).

What follows is a lightly edited transcript of my conversation with DeChristopher.

I first asked Tim what he thought about the actions of the big

mainstream environmental organizations in the context of the new Trump administration.

Tim DeChristopher: I really don't think that most mainstream climate environmental organizations are operating with any kind of intentional strategy in which they think that what they are doing will lead to positive change. When groups are mobilizing their members to "send a message" or "make their voices heard" to [US Secretary of the Interior Ryan] Zinke, [Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott] Pruitt or Trump, I doubt any staffers in those groups actually think that what they are doing has any potential of working. I think they are hemmed-in by the norms of social movement organizing. Those norms demand relentless optimism and positivity, so there is very little room for open reflection on our mistakes, changing direction or acknowledging that certain goals are no longer possible. Those norms also define leadership around knowing what to do and giving people tangible and immediate things to do.

I think most organizations and leaders would feel extremely nervous about saying to their community, "I don't know what needs to be done in this unprecedented situation." There is a mainstream assumption that they would no longer be justified in their leadership position if they expressed that uncertainty. But I think one of our most critical needs for a future of climate chaos is to develop a model of uncertain leadership. This is a kind of leadership that can hold space for sitting with uncertainty and empower a broader community of people to actively think and work in that space of vulnerability. Such leadership is embodied not in one's ability to control a situation, but in one's courage to engage with and relate to the situation.

RH: Historically, nonviolent protest and civil disobedience have developed as successful strategies for social change mostly within the context of liberal democracies. For example, there has been some discussion about whether [Mahatma] Gandhi's efforts would have been as successful if Britain had not had a free press and other democratic institutions. Without a free press, regimes can simply imprison and kill protesters with minimal public awareness of either the protest or its repression. How do you think protest might evolve if the US continues its trajectory toward authoritarianism?

TDeC: I think that Trump has certainly changed the dynamics of civil disobedience at the federal level. It's worth noting that Erica Chenoweth's research has shown that [nonviolent civil resistance is often more effective](#) under authoritarian regimes, but I think Trump represents a very rare kind of power. Part of the efficacy of civil disobedience is often that it pulls back the facade of decency or democracy to reveal power that is actually rooted in violence. The police violence at Standing Rock was an embarrassment to Obama because he had hinged his authority on lofty ideals, but in fact his real power was the state's monopoly on violence. Even Bush Jr. ran on a platform of being a "compassionate conservative." It was a lie, but he needed that lie. Trump, however, never tried to project a facade of compassion or even decency. His power is based on ruthlessness and the breaking of taboos. If he is put into a position in

which he has to violently repress nonviolent dissent, it may actually strengthen his power rather than undermine it.

In terms of media, I think our trajectory is not one of outright suppression of a free press to the point of avoiding public awareness, but rather a bifurcation of the press and social media to the point that no one has to accept anything they don't want to believe. This is a serious challenge not only for civil disobedience, but for all social change efforts regardless of strategy. It is further exacerbated by new video manipulation technologies. It is very hard to see how we avoid either nihilism or civil war.

RH: So, what to do?

TDeC: My current thinking is that our best bet to overcome these challenges is making protest far more diffuse and widespread. With the lack of a central narrative or even a consensus reality, big iconic protests with famous people will likely continue to become less effective. But we all have a small circle of people whom we can influence in ways that are not dependent on media. Because our current culture has such justifiable skepticism of manipulation, one's own willingness to sacrifice is more critical than ever for using our influence effectively, so I think civil disobedience will continue to play an important role for that. So perhaps this is to say that protest needs to follow the path that needs to be followed for so many other changes we need to make: more localized, more diverse, more people involved, more experimentation. No goddamn mono-crop social movements!

RH: How is your own organization, the Climate Disobedience Center, dealing with these issues and challenges? What concrete actions are you taking that different from the strategies of the 'Big Green' groups?

TDeC: The Climate Disobedience Center began as a resource and support center for folks doing civil disobedience against the fossil fuel industry. At the time, a certain brand of safe and limited civil disobedience was being increasingly embraced by the mainstream of the climate movement. We felt that there was an opportunity to work with those folks who were engaging in direct action and help them manifest the full potential of vulnerable and transformative civil disobedience. We primarily ended up filling the particular void in the movement around supporting folks after the point of arrest as they engage with the court system. Over time, we realized that rather than providing a plug-in service that could easily interface with a mainstream model, we were approaching this work with a fundamentally different paradigm that demanded a holistic structure. So we refocused our efforts on building small praxis groups of holistic support, like a cross between an affinity group and a small group ministry. These are groups of folks who support one another to live with integrity in a time of climate crisis. One piece of that is the moral responsibility to act to mitigate whatever harms can still be avoided, but we believe that work cannot be detached from the need to build resilient communities as well as grieve for that which is already being lost. As these are largely unprecedented challenges, we are trying to create the practices of mutual support that allow for as much experimentation and creativity as possible.

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DeChristopher emphasizes that simply [getting rid of Trump](#) as first priority will not solve the environmental crisis. If the system wasn't sufficiently self-correcting before, and if the status quo is irreparably broken, then it's clear that some other change in strategy is needed.

He also calls for more local and experimental activism and civil disobedience, warning that large-scale protests could simply become indiscernible components of the noise being generated by the implosion of the US political system.

My own tendency is to look at the big picture. In that regard, my gut and intellect both tell me that the Trump interval is best understood as a stage in societal collapse. Each stage of that process will no doubt follow its own internal logic. As the stages progress, larger scales of societal organization (international institutions, then nation states) will tend to fail first. Therefore the usefulness of national and global strategies for resistance and repair will tend to gradually diminish.

If we want to minimize human suffering and protect ecosystems, then working locally to build community resilience is probably the best strategy available. The reasons are plentiful and the rationale only grows stronger as our context evolves.